

First international survey on the psychology of meat consumption

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The consumption of meat is not merely a question of taste as is generally assumed. It also necessarily involves beliefs that the killing and eating of certain animals is justified. German and American researchers looked at the attitudes expressed by meat consumers in three surveys in which nearly 1,000 persons participated. The research team developed a questionnaire that would enable them to assess these beliefs and that

differentiated between two aspects of the beliefs of meat-eaters, i.e., that meat consumption is justified and that human beings naturally have a position of dominance over animals. As a result of these surveys, the psychologists were able to confirm that meat eating is associated with attitudes that endorse hierarchical structures. Their findings have been published in the eminent specialist journal *Appetite*.

People's most common answer to the question why they eat [meat](#) is because it "tastes good." However, the theory of carnism postulated by Melanie Joy assumes that there is an underlying [belief](#) system that preconditions people to eat certain animals while paradoxically treating others as inedible, such as pets that are considered to be members of the family. The German-American team of researchers now empirically investigated this carnistic viewpoint for the first time. Dr. Tamara Pfeiler of JGU's Institute of Psychology and Christopher Monteiro of Cornell University, the two primary authors of the published article, first developed a questionnaire, the so-called Carnism Inventory, in order to investigate specific attitudes. In the survey, participants were asked questions such as whether people should continue to eat meat because they have already been doing so for thousands of years, whether eating meat is better for their health, whether meat production causes animals to suffer, and whether human beings have the natural right to kill animals.

The Carnism Inventory proved to be a suitable tool for determining the beliefs of the survey participants. The results reveal that [meat consumption](#) is not merely a matter of taste but is also associated with carnism-related defense arguments that justify the killing and eating of animals. "We came to the conclusion that, just as in the case of vegetarianism and veganism, there is an underlying set of beliefs underpinning the eating of meat," stated Dr. Tamara Pfeiler. The survey findings also differentiate between two different forms of outlook. In the one hand, carnism offers a justification for the eating of meat and

there is a correlation between the extent of meat consumption and the belief in this justification; on the other hand, carnism also proposes that humans are naturally dominant and are thus allowed to kill [animals](#) for meat, while this process is actually determined by the fact of whether an animal has already been slaughtered for the purposes of [meat production](#).

There are also correlations between carnistic beliefs and specific political and social attitudes that tend to be more conservative and favor the establishment of hierarchies within human groups. "Carnistic beliefs also seem to be associated with an attitude that approves of dominance within social structures and could thus encourage the development of prejudices towards certain social categories. However, this does not mean that meat-eating people are automatically more likely to exhibit prejudice towards other groups of people," emphasized Pfeiler. There are correlations but no evidence of a causal relation. Future investigations are planned in order to establish the precise links between carnism, the consumption of meat, and the acceptance of [hierarchical structures](#).

More information: Christopher A. Monteiro et al. The Carnism Inventory: Measuring the ideology of eating animals, *Appetite* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.appet.2017.02.011](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2017.02.011)

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